

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE REVIEW PANEL
MEETING MINUTES

Date: September 29, 2011

Meeting No.: 136

Project: East Baltimore Community School Campus

Phase: Introduction

Location: Ashland and Collington Avenues

PRESENTATION:

Chris Shea, of EBDI and a Board member of the East Baltimore Community School, provided an overview of the project, emphasizing the importance of the school to community building. The school is a designated public contract school and will be operated jointly by Morgan State University and Johns Hopkins University. First and foremost the school is a neighborhood school and will draw from the EBDI neighborhood boundaries. If slots are available, then students from adjacent neighborhoods can apply through a lottery system. The school is K-8 and expects to eventually house 580 students. As a community school, the campus will not only include school facilities (classrooms, administration, gym, library, etc) and outdoor play spaces that will be shared with the community, but also early childhood learning and a family resource center. Boundaries for the campus are Washington along the west, Ashland to the south, Patterson Park Avenue to the east, and the railroad tracks to the north. The entire site will be cleared except for a block of houses along Ashland Street that will be used for the library and several houses at the corner of Ashland and Patterson Park Avenue (use to be determined).

An RFQ competition was held for the design of the school, with Rogers Marvel Architects winning the commission. Vince Lee and Kip Katich, of Rogers Marvel Architects, presented their competition entry including the site and context analysis, design concepts, programming, and initial designs. The school campus is organized around a block pattern and common spaces / outdoor spaces, with Collington Commons (the former Collington Street) as the central pedestrian spine and entrance to the campus. On the interior of the campus a series of "houses" (educational clusters) surround the outdoor spaces. Along the public edge of the campus, the west edge holds the family resource center and early childhood learning areas, while the south edge is of a more civic nature, with the library, gym, and auditorium. The northern edge holds play spaces, parking, and recreational fields.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL:

The Panel complimented the design team with their thoughtful analysis of the site, their strong design concept, and the relationship of the campus to the surrounding context. The team appears to be moving in a strong direction, and the Panel looks forward to seeing further development of

the project as it moves from competition to a more defined program and budget. The Panel has the following recommendations for the design team to consider:

Scale of the buildings and outdoor spaces. The majority of the new construction was described as one level. Care needs to be given to the height of the buildings and how they relate to the surrounding existing and new context. More information about massing and street sections along the edges of the campus is needed. The gym and auditorium along Ashland offer an opportunity to have a higher profile but, given that these spaces have few if any windows, additional thought needs to be given as to their street edge (openings and entrances). Some type of tower and/or vertical element should be studied as a way of providing scale and identity.

Outdoor spaces. The Panel felt that the use of outdoor spaces, whether as gathering spaces, interior / exterior pedestrian streets, or play spaces, was a strength of the design concept. More information is needed, however, as to how they will be used. Also, it would be important to understand the relationship of nearby public spaces and how the campus spaces offer new uses and/or complement existing nearby uses. Also, the relationship between the playfields and interior school spaces appears to be weak and not as strong as the interior / exterior relationship found in other parts of the campus. The park spaces along Patterson Park Avenue and on the north edge of the campus seem unresolved, especially on the north where there are outdoor spaces that are more aligned with the school. Finally, while having a community garden is a good idea it needs further resolution as to how it would be shared with the school – the creation of outdoor learning spaces (outdoor clusters) might be a way to structure these spaces and better integrate the parking areas (treating them as courts rather than simply paved areas).

Pedestrian connections. Given that the school is meant to serve the immediate neighborhood, the pedestrian connections are very important. More information is needed as to streetscape and sidewalk as well as the pedestrian connection that is an extension of Eager Street.

Campus layout. The Panel had no issues with the general layout of the campus, commenting that locating the more civic uses of the campus – the family resource center, the gym, and the auditorium - is a strength of the plan. As the program develops, the team should consider flipping the location of the gym and auditorium, which might provide a better relationship to the exterior playfields (gym) and a better relationship to the main entrance (auditorium). Additionally, it is not clear why the houses are being retained on the southeast corner of the site, their relationship to the campus, and their projected use (especially since this is a gateway corner).

Site topography. Given the slope of the site from Ashland to the train tracks, site sections are critical to understand how the buildings conform to the site as well as how exterior spaces (whether fields or walkways) adjust to the slope, incorporate stair and ramps, and/or create hard site edges (like retaining walls).

Campus image. The Panel was struck by the power of the image as shown from the train. Powerful images of the campus from the neighborhood need further expression and development, not just at the main entrance but looking toward the southeast and southwest corners of the campus.

Relationship to the EBDI Master Plan. Given the acknowledged importance of the school to the EBDI master plan, and the school's goals of connecting to a network of green spaces and creating a community gateway, an updated master plan, with the school campus layout shown within the plan, is needed.

PANEL ACTION:

Introduction - No action needed.

Attending:

Christopher Shea, Linda LoCascio, Dennis Miller, Stephen Campbell – EBDI
Vince Lee, Kip Katich – RMA
Susan Williams – STV

Ms. Eig; Messrs. Bowden, Ramberg, Britt and Cameron – Panel
Tom Stosur, Gary Cole, Natasha Becker, Erv McDaniel, Anthony Cataldo, Bob Quilter -
Planning